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C O N F I D E N T I A L ZAGREB 000546

SIPDIS

FOR EUR/SCE, EUR/PPD, EUR/RPM AND EUR/ERA
OSD FOR POPOVICH

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SUBJECT: ZAGREB WEEKLY ACTIVITY REPORT - SEPTEMBER 4, 2009

Classified By: Political Officer Christopher Zimmer for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

1. (SBU) SMALLER ETHNIC SERB PARTIES UNITE:

On August 31, three small ethnic Serb parties, primarily based out of the Vukovar area, announced that they are uniting in an attempt to provide a viable alternative for Serb voters and to counterbalance the main ethnic Serb party, the Independent Democratic Serb Party (SDSS). The three uniting parties are the Serb People's Party (SNS), Democratic Party of Serbs (DPS), and the New Serb Party (NSS), none of which have any seats in Croatian parliament. Both the DPS and NSS are still relatively new on the political scene, having formed just months before local elections last May, and none of these parties fared very well in those elections.

SDSS Vice President Milorad Pupavac confided to PolOffs on September 2 that the actions of these parties were a result of the political ambitions of Veljko Dzakula, the head of the NGO Serb Democratic Forum (SDF), and the leadership of these smaller parties consists mostly of disgruntled ex-SDSS members whose shady dealings had put them at odds with the SDSS. (DMEGES)

2. (C) HEAD OF CROATIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE ANNOUNCES PRESIDENTIAL BID:

After weeks of speculation, Nadan Vidosevic, head of the Croatian Chamber of Commerce and CEO of the Croatian candy company Kras, announced on September 2 that he was entering the presidential race as an independent candidate. Vidosevic, well known for his charisma and ability to engage the public on economic matters, has been hinting for weeks that he was considering a presidential bid, including at a Charge d'Affaires-hosted lunch the day before his formal announcement where he emphasized that given the state of the economy Croatia's next president would need to be well-versed in economic matters. Vidosevic, a long-time Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) member, was promptly dropped from HDZ membership and the party's presidential candidate, Andrija Hebrang criticized Vidosevic's entry into the race as selfish and accused him of using the party for personal gain. Local media have been quick to point out that Vidosevic is a serious centrist candidate that could attract votes from both the right and left. Vidosevic, a frequent companion of President Mesic on international trips, has been courting Mesic for months in the hopes that the popular outgoing president will eventually support his candidacy, but advisors close to Mesic have confided to the Embassy that Mesic is troubled by media reports of possible corrupt dealings that Vidosevic may have engaged in during the late 1990s. (DMEGES)

3. (U) SDP LEADS BY A WIDENING MARGIN:

The Croatian leading polling companies "Puls" and "Promocija Plus" came up with similar results in their August surveys of public opinion. According to Puls, 34.8 percent of those polled would vote for the main opposition Social Democratic Party (SDP), while 22.3 percent would vote for the ruling

Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). Along with its partners HNS and IDS, the SDP would win 44 percent of the vote, while the HDZ and its partners HSS and HSLS would win 31 percent. The Croatian Party of Pensioners (HSU) which has recently left the ruling coalition, returned to its relatively high rating from before it joined the ruling coalition, getting 6.9 percent in Puls's poll, in fourth place among all political parties in Croatia. According to Promocija Plus, SDP would win 30.5 percent and the HDZ 21.9 percent. This represents the widest advantage the SDP has seen in the polls since early 2007. Furthermore, Puls found that as many as 80 percent of citizens believed the government was heading in the wrong direction - the worst rating for the HDZ-led government since its formation in early 2008. Puls's survey is based on field interviews with approximately 1000 respondents. Promocija plus uses a computer-assisted telephone method to interview 1300 respondents. (ZTomic)

WALKER